

Sir Thomas Rich's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115717
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	290313
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Gloria Dolan HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	566
6th form	254
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janferie Wilton
Headteacher	Ian Kellie
Date of previous school inspection	8 October 2001
School address	Oakleaze Gloucester GL2 0LF
Telephone number	01452 338400
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sir Thomas Rich's School is oversubscribed. The main school is smaller than average but it has a large sixth form. Girls make up about 30% of the sixth form students. The school has specialist language and science status. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds at the school is higher than in the local population. The proportion of students identified as having additional learning needs is below average

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Sir Thomas Rich's is an outstanding school. Students make excellent progress, and have significantly higher than average attainment at each key stage. Almost all students complete their A-level courses and progress to university.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students show courtesy and respect to one another, staff and visitors. As they progress through the school, students develop excellent study and life skills. They are articulate, confident and well rounded individuals due to the many opportunities available to them. Students willingly immerse themselves in the rich diversity of extra-curricular activities provided at school. They enjoy learning and attendance rates are extremely high. Students make an excellent contribution, through school councils and other activities, to the life of the school and also to the wider community. Social responsibility and charitable works feature prominently at school. Students support the education of less fortunate children overseas and sixth formers work with children at a local school. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Safe practices are carefully adhered to by students in lessons and around the school. Students have good knowledge of healthy lifestyles and participate in a large range of sports with great enthusiasm.

Students' learning is outstanding because of the highly effective teaching they receive. Students are very keen to do well. They know the target grades they are working towards and what they need to do to improve their performance and be successful. Students listen attentively in lessons and ask teachers searching questions which are answered fully and clearly. New or specialist vocabulary, concepts and topics are introduced effectively. Good questioning techniques are used to confirm understanding and help students to critically analyse complex topics. The school is aware that occasionally lessons do not fully challenge students.

The curriculum and other activities are outstanding. Students receive a broad education in the main school and have a good choice of subjects in the sixth form. Many students take extra GCSEs or some qualifications earlier than normal. The extensive range and high take-up of enrichment activities undoubtedly enhance students' learning and experience of life.

Students receive outstanding support both with their academic studies and with any personal problems. Staff are approachable and provide support whenever it is needed. Students' academic progress is very closely monitored and fully reviewed every six weeks. Students are almost always clear about how to proceed and what they must do to improve their performance further.

Leadership and management throughout the school are outstanding. A clear sense of purpose is espoused by all staff and managers. Governance is strong. A real strength of the school is the highly effective self-evaluation and monitoring of its performance. Effective actions to address identified issues are put in place promptly. Equality of opportunity is promoted very effectively and this results in a harmonious and well integrated school population.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Students who are new to the school undergo an excellent, extended induction which enables them to settle quickly and happily into their new environment. It is exceptional for anyone to leave the sixth form and both boys and girls do very well at A level. The proportion of A-level passes graded A and B is consistently very high. Students work hard and quickly develop very good skills for independent learning

which are essential for further study at university. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Students ask searching questions in lessons which are answered fully and clearly by teachers. Oral questioning is well used and carefully targeted by teachers so that students develop the ability to critically analyse complex topics very effectively. Students learn in a mutually respectful environment. They enjoy their lessons and the wide range of enrichment activities. The progress made by students is excellent and most lessons have a stimulating and snappy pace. Students' progress is closely monitored and reviewed and challenging targets are set. Homework is set and marked frequently and written comments provide good advice on how students can improve. Both academic and pastoral support are very good and students feel well cared for. Leadership and management are outstanding and robust actions are taken to address any identified problems.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that high quality teaching, which meets the needs of individual students, is provided consistently throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Achievement and standards are outstanding. Students are selected from the top 40% of the ability range. Their attainment is high at all key stages and they make excellent overall progress. Students enter the school with high attainment at Key Stage 2 and by the end of Key Stage 3 their overall attainment is very much higher than the national average. The proportion of students who reach Level 7 or above in English is high; it is very high in mathematics and science and it increased markedly in all subjects in 2006. Students' attainment in all three core subjects has been significantly higher than the national average for the last five years.

Students make very good progress at Key Stage 4. All students consistently achieve at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C and virtually all students passed both English and mathematics at grades A*-C in 2006. The proportion of top grades awarded at GCSE is consistently very high. Students' average point score is very high. There are no significant differences between the progress made by students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Most students stay on into the sixth form. Retention rates are excellent and the proportion of A and B grades awarded is consistently very high at both AS and A level. Overall, students make excellent progress and meet challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Students are extremely positive about school and value the strong community spirit. They serve their community well. They show initiative, take responsibility and develop very good personal skills. This can be seen through the active and effective school council and through numerous fund raising activities. The excellent school visits programme also helps them develop personally. Sixth form students take on leadership responsibilities, particularly to support younger students.

Students' positive attitudes are shown through their diligence in lessons and the very high numbers who participate in the wide range of activities offered outside the school day. Attendance is well above the national average. Behaviour is very good, both in lessons and around the school, and there is a calm and orderly atmosphere.

Students know the importance of diet and exercise in leading healthy lives and there is very good uptake of sports provision at school. Students are sometimes reluctant to try the good and healthy food and drink choices available to them at school. Students feel very safe and know that the rare incidents of bullying will be dealt with very effectively. Students are confident to talk to staff and older students if they have personal difficulties.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching and learning in the main school and in the sixth form are outstanding overall. There is much good teaching and a significant amount that is outstanding. Teachers have high levels of subject knowledge and they provide lessons which are intellectually demanding. Teachers are effective at successfully developing students' ability to study increasingly complex topics as they progress through the school. Homework is set frequently and returned promptly. Written and verbal feedback on students' work is very helpful for students to improve their performance. Occasionally, written feedback is too brief to be of most benefit. Extra academic support is readily available to students across the school.

Students' learning is outstanding because of the highly effective teaching and frequent assessment of their work. They develop very good skills for independent learning. Students are keen to learn. They listen attentively in lessons, readily answer questions and take full part in other activities. The best lessons have excellent pace and use a variety of learning strategies to ensure that all students' learning needs are very effectively met. Information learning technology is used well to enhance learning in many lessons. Students' time is used less productively in a few lessons when tasks are not appropriately demanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum provision is outstanding; it is broad and balanced and meets the needs of its students very well. A significant proportion of students take qualifications early.

All students study two modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3 and study at least one language to a full GCSE. The GCSE curriculum is carefully constructed around students' preferred choices. It is rare for anyone to be denied their first choice. The most able students appropriately take GCSE mathematics in Year 10 and additional mathematics at the end of Year 11. Religious studies GCSE is taken by most students in Year 10. A small number of Year 10 students take AS computing. The enrichment programme expands the number of GCSEs available by providing courses in geology and Latin, for example. There is a wide range of AS and A levels to choose from in the sixth form.

Enrichment activities are vibrant, extensive and highly valued by students. All students take part in educational visits, many of which are abroad or in different parts of the United Kingdom. Students are actively involved in external sporting competitions and numerous school clubs such as a railway club or where they learn many different languages. Specialist facilities at school allow for such sports as water polo, badminton and rugby.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support for students is outstanding. Form tutors have a high level of commitment to the welfare of the students, effectively monitoring both personal development and academic progress. Attainment grades are regularly recorded to evaluate progress and identify where extra help or challenge may be needed. From this information the student and tutor agree new and challenging targets. As a result, students make excellent progress, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The school knows its students well as individuals and this helps it to identify those who are vulnerable and put in place appropriate support. The school seeks advice and support from other agencies when necessary. Child protection procedures meet requirements but recent updating training has not taken place.

There is an excellent induction programme for students joining the school in Year 7 and this level of support and guidance continues as they progress through each stage of the school, including the sixth form. The wide range of work experience opportunities in Years 11 and 12 gives students a valuable insight into the world of work. Careers education is good and students are very well informed about their future options and alternative career routes and progression.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The school is extremely well led by the headmaster. He provides clarity of purpose and direction and is deeply committed to securing excellence in every aspect of the school's work. His leadership is complemented by a strong senior management team. They work cohesively to ensure that both personal development and academic achievement are exemplary.

The value placed on all members of staff has created excellent teamwork and real commitment to the school. This sense of community and equality of opportunity is a major strength. It is clear that the vision, standards and ethos promoted by the senior management team are enthusiastically supported by staff, students and their parents.

There is an evident passion and commitment to continuous improvement. The school's highly effective improvement planning is based on secure self-evaluation. Monitoring performance is undertaken by managers throughout the school on a regular basis. Effective measures to address any issues which have been identified are implemented promptly. Specialist language and science status has been particularly well planned and managed.

There is no complacency in any aspect of the school's work. Managers constantly strive to promote the school's aims of achieving the highest academic standards, high standards of behaviour and appearance and extensive extra-curricular provision. Procedures for safeguarding students meet current government requirements. Managers demonstrate outstanding capacity to improve the school further.

The governing body is highly effective, providing a good balance of support and challenge for the school. Financial governance is outstanding and resources are well deployed throughout the school. Recent investment in information and communication technology (ICT) has led to considerable enhancement in many curricular areas.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for your positive contributions during our visit to your school recently. We learnt a great deal from talking with you and the staff, hearing from your parents and joining your lessons and other activities. We valued your judgements and took them into account when reaching our conclusions.

We found that Sir Thomas Rich's School is an outstanding school and you are right to be proud of it. There are several reasons for this. It is led and managed excellently by the headmaster and senior staff. They know the school very well because they are constantly checking how well you are learning and making the right decisions about how to help you make still more progress. There is much good teaching with a significant amount of it being outstanding and this helps you to succeed in your studies.

The relationships between teachers and students are exemplary. Teachers support and guide you very well and provide you with a safe environment in which to learn. The curriculum that the school offers you is excellent and enriched in lots of ways. For instance, the range of languages you can learn, options in the sixth form, activity days and after-school clubs all contribute to making school life varied and interesting.

You are a major part of what makes the school outstanding. Your behaviour is very good, as is the way you get on with one another and show respect for your teachers and visitors to the school. You are enthusiastic in lessons and interested in your studies. You take pride in your work and your test and examination results are impressive. All of this happens because the headmaster, staff, governors, students and parents share a determination that the school will meet its aims of promoting the highest academic standards, high standards of behaviour and appearance and extensive extra-curricular provision.

Because your school is so good, our only advice for future development is to ensure that high quality teaching is provided consistently throughout the school.

Thank you once again for helping us and the inspectors would like to wish you all every success for the future.